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A PROPOSAL FOR A GRADED BIBLE SCHOOL.

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A WIDESPREAD conviction that something more should be done to meet the recognized need of a graded course of study in Sunday schools led to the appointment of a committee by the Illinois State Association of Congregational Churches at its annual meeting in May, 1900. A year later, 1901, the committee submitted a sixteen-page printed report, incorporating as closely as was deemed practicable the principles and methods suggested by the new pedagogy, the new psychology, and the new Bible study. In applying these principles, two points of interest were kept prominently in mind: the selection of lessons adapted to pupils of different ages, thus giving a wider range of study; and the method of presenting the lessons.

The report, which is called "The Graded Bible School," provides for six grades or departments of the school:

1. *The cradle roll*.—For children below kindergarten age, not yet old enough to attend the school.

2. *The kindergarten*.—For children under seven years of age, who do not yet go to the public schools. Kindergarten methods are used in topical instruction, Bible object-lessons, and nature studies. For this work there are excellent books of lessons and of general direction.

3. *The graded Bible school*.—In the main school twelve grades are arranged, corresponding to those in the public school, containing children from seven to eighteen years of age, inclusive. These twelve grades are grouped into three departments:

(1) Primary. First to fourth grades. Bible stories and Bible truths, preferably from the New Testament, in the first and second grades (pupils seven and eight years of age); and Bible stories from the Old Testament in the third and fourth grades (pupils nine and ten years of age). Special emphasis is laid upon committing to memory verses and passages of Scripture. Object-lessons and nature lessons are also to be used. Here also there are first-class series of lessons already available.

(2) Junior or Intermediate. Fifth to eighth grades. In the fifth and sixth grades (pupils eleven and twelve years of age) the life of Christ is to be studied connectedly. In the seventh and eighth grades (pupils thirteen and fourteen years of age) the history of the early Christian church and the life of Paul are to be studied. Christian biography and Christian missions are also introduced in these grades as supplemental work.

A New Testament is given to each pupil in this department to be used in his study. Of suitable text-books for these grades there is a lack. The Bible Study Union Lessons may be employed, and there are good books on the life of Christ and the life of Paul which can be used as text-books.

The school year of study is made to correspond with that of the public schools, beginning in the autumn and ending in the spring. The summer is given to special subjects of study, supplemental to that of the regular school year. This admits of the absences or vacation often necessary during the summer months, without breaking up the continuity of the year's instruction.

(3) Senior. Ninth to twelfth grades. This is the "decision period" of the young life, and the instruction is to be directed toward developing the individuality of the boy or girl into the religion and ethics of true Christian manhood and womanhood. The ninth and tenth grades (pupils fifteen and sixteen years of age) provide a connected study of Old Testament history and teaching. The eleventh grade (pupils seventeen years of age) provides a second study of the life of Christ and of the apostolic Christian history. The twelfth grade (pupils eighteen years of age) consists of a study of Christian beliefs and evidences, of the teachings of Jesus applied to everyday life, and of Christian duties and the church.

For these courses of study there are many good books which can be used as text-books, and not a few excellent series of lessons prepared.

4. *The adult Bible classes.*—The pupils should never be allowed to feel that the completion of the work in the graded Bible school means graduation, but only promotion to the Bible classes. In this department a large number of courses can be arranged, providing more extended and more thorough work in the history, teaching, and literature of the Bible, and also in church history, ethics, sociology, and theology.

5. *The normal course.*—The normal course is designed for those

graduates of the graded Bible school who desire to fit themselves to be teachers in the school. It consists of a review of the subjects taught in the graded Bible school, and of an adequate study of the principles and methods of religious pedagogy and Christian nurture.

6. *The home-study department.*—The aim of this department is to get parents to assist their children in studying their lessons, and to furnish instruction to those who are “shut in” so that they cannot attend the regular Bible school.

The committee which prepared the report just outlined was continued, and in May, 1902, a second report, also printed, was submitted and enthusiastically received. This was principally to show what progress had been made during the year. Brief reports of the work being done in ten schools showed a clear perception of the plan and a decided increase in interest. One of them says:

Our method is to grade the lesson to fit the uniform life of developing children, instead of grading the school to fit a uniform Scripture lesson, diluted for the youngest, condensed for the oldest, and perhaps fitted for neither. A peculiar feature in the working out of the plan is our system of supervising teachers. This consists in having a leader for each grade. We retain the small group in the class, and the teacher moves from grade to grade with the class. The leader directs the teachers and meets the classes together about once a month for review and pre-view. We aim to have the leader a trained teacher and a specialist in the department. The pastor's classes, previously held on a weekday, have been made part of the school system. At the period when decision for Christ should be made, the pastor finds himself in weekly contact with all the youth of the best age to be influenced. This has given him a larger number of boys of high-school age in his class than he has ever succeeded in reaching before. The plan may be introduced most effectively with a few classes at a time, preferably beginning with the younger. The children will not then have been paralyzed by the notion that the Sunday school is not a school. They will be more ready to study and recite. We have tables at which the scholars sit, thus permitting the use of pen and ink, for notebooks, map work, etc. Doing work stimulates work. Our aim is to train the pupils in the Bible method of successful living, and our prayer is that each one in the school will intelligently choose the only sure guide, our Lord Jesus Christ, before he completes the course.

The committee offered further suggestions concerning methods of teaching, courses of study, and available text-books.

It is to be regretted that the recent International Sunday School Convention (held at Denver last June) went no farther than to adopt

a beginners' course, which had been recommended at the Boston convention in 1896. The rejection of the proposal of lessons for advanced classes was a serious mistake; there is already large demand for such; indeed, advanced courses of study are already being used by many schools.

But, however important the lessons, the emphasis placed upon the need of training for Bible-school teachers along the lines of the best educational methods is of special importance, and strikes to the heart of the Sunday-school problem of today. The new study of the Bible has placed within the easy reach of the teachers quantities of historical, geographical, and literary material. This has given a new impetus to the historical method of study, and the need of Bible study was never greater. Facts and materials are so abundant; yet it is said that popular ignorance of the Bible is on the increase. This is, no doubt, due primarily to the neglect of Bible instruction in the home, the day school, and the college; but it is also due, in large measure, to the fact that the teaching in Sunday schools is not up to date when compared with the modern educational methods used in the day school. The loss is very great when we consider what might be gained if up-to-date principles were applied to the study of the Bible as of other subjects; all classes of minds must be reached and held to the Sunday school and to Bible study, and so to the Christian life. Such study will not hinder, but will rather render far more helpful and powerful, the work of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of both young and old. The kingdom is growing, never faster or better than now. The Bible will again be taught in the public schools; and Bible-school teachers will be specially trained for their work in the Sunday school.

It is very encouraging, and one of the most hopeful signs of our time, that in so many academies and colleges the study of the Bible is urged or required as a part of the regular course. This will greatly help Sunday-school instruction. Prominent educators connected with influential schools of learning, and men in other professions, have undertaken to advance this great movement, and the outlook is most encouraging for a mighty increase in the efficiency of Sunday-school teaching. The American Institute of Sacred Literature, directed by the Council of Seventy, has greatly quickened the popular study of the Bible, widened the sphere of knowledge, and improved Sunday-school teaching. And the BIBLICAL WORLD is exercising a conspicuous leadership in the increase of intelligence about the Bible, as well

as in securing a proper place for the Bible and for religion in the education of the young.

A number of the leading theological seminaries, both east and west, are planning courses of training for Sunday-school officers and teachers. Hartford Theological Seminary now awards the degree of bachelor of religious pedagogy to those who complete the prescribed course of study in this department. It is hoped that many theological students may avail themselves of these privileges, thus preparing themselves to become teachers of teachers when they enter the actual work of the ministry. If, as Bishop Potter says, we need a teaching church, even more do we need a teaching ministry, and we shall not have the former till we have the latter. We cannot have trained teachers in large numbers till ministers are trained teachers and are willing to devote a fair share of their time and scholarship to training members of their churches to teach. Some have proved, others are proving, that this is both practicable and useful. One constantly hears ministers of both large and small churches say that the Sunday school is the most hopeful work of the church today, that it offers the greatest opportunity for the spread of truth and righteousness. Therefore everything possible should be done to make it as efficient as possible.